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Larsson, Germund; Westberg, Johannes

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Child Labour, Parental Neglect, School Boards, and Teacher Quality: School Inspector Reports on the Supply and Demand of Schooling in Mid-nineteenth-century Sweden

Germund Larsson

Uppsala University

Johannes Westberg

University of Groningen/Örebro University

ABSTRACT

By examining the state school inspector reports of 1861–1863, which provide rich insights into the local conditions of schooling in Sweden, this article sheds further light on the wide range of factors that weakened school enrolment and attendance in nineteenth-century Sweden. In terms of parental demand, these included child labour on farms, at manors, and in industries; the transformation of the servant system among rural households; and religious practices, such as the confirmation and the beliefs of Protestant sectarian groups. On the supply side, factors that school inspectors reported included the inability of Swedish teacher seminars to examine enough teachers and the problematic behaviour of local school boards. As a result, this article provides additional input into the debate in educational history regarding the role of the state, religion, rural elites, and parents in the rise of mass schooling, while simultaneously providing further qualitative evidence to a quantitatively oriented research field in economic history on the determinants of schooling.

RÉSUMÉ

En considérant avec attention les rapports des inspecteurs des écoles publiques de 1861 à 1863, lesquels fournissent un riche aperçu sur les conditions locales d'enseignement en Suède, cet article met en lumière le vaste éventail de facteurs qui ont affecté l'inscription et la fréquentation scolaires dans ce pays au dix-neuvième siècle. En ce qui avait trait à la demande parentale étaient compris le travail des enfants dans les fermes, dans les manoirs et dans les industries; la transformation du système domestique au sein des ménages ruraux et les pratiques religieuses telles que la confirmation et les croyances des groupes de confession protestante. Sur le plan de l'offre, les inspecteurs scolaires ont rapporté l'incapacité des séminaires de la formation enseignante de Suède à analyser suffisamment d'enseignantes et d'enseignants ainsi que l'attitude problématique des conseils scolaires locaux. Alors qu'il apporte son lot d'informations

supplémentaires, cet article alimente le débat en histoire de l'éducation portant sur les rôles de l'État, de la religion, des élites rurales et des parents à l'aube de la scolarisation de masse. Simultanément, il fournit un certain nombre de données qualitatives à des recherches généralement quantitatives dans le domaine de l'histoire économique portant sur les déterminants de la scolarisation.

Introduction

The grand narrative of schooling in the long nineteenth century is that of victory. From being a rather marginal phenomenon among common people, schooling became a normal experience in a growing number of countries as school enrolments and school attendance rose. As existing research has shown, this was a development enabled by parents, who sent their children to school; local communities and local government (school districts, municipalities, townships, communes), which bore the main burden of funding and organizing schooling; and central governments, which issued school acts, employed state school inspectors, and distributed state subsidies.¹

While existing research has stressed the factors or structures that enabled this striking development that surely deserves to be referred to as an educational revolution, this article contributes to the body of literature that has shed light upon the limitations and shortfalls of nineteenth-century schooling. Instead of asking why children started to go to school, this article will address the question of why many nineteenth-century children did not attend school.

Using the first state school inspectors' reports of 1861–1863 in Sweden, the aim of this article is to shed further light on the factors that, in various ways, hampered the development of schooling in the mid-nineteenth century. What were the factors that these inspectors identified, and how did the inspectors describe them? By answering these questions, this article provides additional input into the debate in educational history regarding the role of the state and the local community in the rise of mass schooling, while simultaneously providing further qualitative evidence to a quantitatively oriented research field in economic history on the determinants of schooling.

The Supply of and Demand for Schooling

The growing body of research into the rise of mass schooling has dealt with both the supply of and the demand for schooling.² In the field of history of education, emphasis has been placed on the supply of schooling; that is, those individuals, organizations, or governmental entities responsible for the school system, the social groups supporting them, and their purpose within the school system. As Elsie Rockwell and Eugenia Roldán Vera have noted, the notion of the state or the nation-state has played a vital role in the historiography of schooling. In such research, the central government's regulations and funding have been perceived as fundamental, and even though the powers of the state were met with resistance, the state was presented with a privileged position in these narratives, being the main—or sometimes the only—actor in the history of schooling.³ Such narratives stress the role of school acts, school inspectors, national curricula, and the central government's various attempts to educate national citizens.⁴

Although such narratives have remained important, or even dominant, researchers have questioned the role of the state. The principal criticism against the “illusion of politics” — emphasized by Ben Eklof, among others — that marks many of these narratives remains relevant. We can no longer study the history of schooling as if change is enacted only by politicians and legislators.⁵ The empirical evidence gathered about the decentralized character of nineteenth-century schooling also questions the emphasis on the central government.⁶ If schooling, in terms of organization and funding, was primarily in the hands of local governing bodies (school districts, townships, municipalities), as was the case in Sweden, why should particular attention be given to the central government and its politics? In this context, Nancy Beadie has noted the vast difference between studies at the local level and the central level of school systems. While nation-building rhetoric may have been important at the state level, sentiments of national ideology were certainly not the main reason why nineteenth-century parents sent their children to school.⁷

In this article, we will build upon research that has explored the social, economic, and cultural factors that, aside from state intervention, have shaped the road towards mass schooling. This includes important work in economic history that has examined the impact of landownership concentration, political voice, fiscal capacity, religion, and common lands on local and regional development of schooling.⁸ In addition, studies on the local and regional history of schooling have made great contributions to our understanding of the deficiencies that marked nineteenth-century schooling. In particular, such studies have shed light on the popular demand for schooling, indicating how parents’ lack of interest in education, child labour, and the local organization of schooling hampered school enrolments and school attendance.⁹ A classic example in this respect is Eugene Weber’s account of the modernization of rural France, where he described the difficult conditions facing attempts to extend schooling. These included derelict school buildings, uneducated and unsuitable teachers, long home-to-school distances, harsh poverty, and child labour.¹⁰

In the Swedish case, local studies have provided further insights into these matters. Mats Sjöberg, for example, has shown how parents’ vision of basic schooling for their children differed from that of school officials and how long home-to-school distances, poverty, and a failure to appreciate the value of education affected school attendance.¹¹ Such results are certainly in line with Egil Johansson’s research, which has mapped the popular resistance towards primary schooling during the first decades following the passage of the school act of 1842.¹² In a similar vein, Johannes Westberg’s local case studies have indicated how this resistance could be expressed in neglecting sending children to school, refusal to pay school taxes, or isolated instances of sabotage, but also how the growth of schooling was hampered by the structure of local school politics.¹³

The present article makes two main contributions to this wide-ranging research field. In relation to the field of economic history, we will provide further qualitative evidence on the determinants of schooling. In relation to the qualitative local case studies, our systematic analysis of state school inspector reports enables us to present a broad overview of the supply and demand factors that affected the provision of schooling. As a result, we will confirm some of the claims made by existing research,

but also raise questions regarding factors that have remained relatively neglected. The latter includes the role played by the servant system, the practice of confirmation reading, school boards, and the supply of trained teachers in the development of the Swedish primary school system. While school boards were part of the governing structure of schooling in Sweden, they also—as will become evident—acted in the interests of the local community.

Nineteenth-century Schooling and School Inspector Reports

The mid-nineteenth-century Swedish school system investigated in this article was outlined by the school act of 1842 (*1842 års folkskolestadga*). According to this act, all Swedish parishes were made responsible for organizing school districts and establishing at least one, preferably permanent, school. These schools were to be funded primarily by the local school districts, under the leadership of school boards, which would be responsible for providing suitable school premises and remunerating a properly trained teacher. At these schools, schoolchildren were to be taught at least a minimum level of knowledge, including reading, writing, arithmetic, church singing, biblical history, and the catechism.¹⁴

During the decade that followed the passing of the school act of 1842, the Swedish primary school system expanded. Primary schools were run in almost half of the Swedish parishes in 1839, and almost all parishes had established schools by the early 1850s.¹⁵ However, this did not imply that all children were enrolled in schools, or that all enrolled schoolchildren attended school. One estimate is that 64.9 per cent of Swedish children aged seven to fourteen were enrolled in 1868, and the attendance of those enrolled has been estimated at 43.2 per cent.¹⁶ Certainly, such estimates raise questions regarding the factors that kept enrolments and attendance down in mid-nineteenth-century Sweden.

To examine these factors, we have investigated the reports of state school inspectors. The first school inspectors in Sweden were appointed in 1861. Although the Swedish primary school system showed rather impressive progress from an international point of view, the deficiencies of the primary school system meant that proposals for stronger control and management over the actions of the local school districts had already been raised in the 1840s. Since school inspectors would imply additional costs and were perceived as obtrusive by the priests who had traditionally controlled the literacy of the population, the government first proposed the creation of a school inspector system in the parliament of 1859–60.¹⁷

These school inspectors were not given the authority to enforce changes to local school policy, but instead were given the task of inspecting and promoting schooling. According to their first instructions, the school inspectors' main tasks were to control and monitor the school system at a local level and to make suggestions as to how the schools could be improved.¹⁸ As a result, school inspectors were not in a position to impose changes on local school districts, but argued themselves that their opinions and suggestions could have a long-term impact.¹⁹

The reports that the school inspectors submitted to the Ministry of Education and

Ecclesiastical Affairs consisted of a general section describing schooling in a certain region. This section would contain information about local school regulations, the relationship between junior schools (*småskolan*)—a kind of primary school intended mainly for the younger children—and regular primary schools, and whether the regulations on home education were being followed. In a section describing individual schools, the inspectors were expected to report on issues such as the day-schedule of schools, the number of pupils attending, teaching methods employed, and the teacher's occupational skills. These reports were also expected to cover material prerequisites, including educational materials and the state of the school premises, including issues of cleanliness and ownership.²⁰

This article focuses mainly on the school inspectors' reports from all twelve dioceses in Sweden during the first inspection period (1861–63). At this early stage of the Swedish school system, the local and regional variations in the implementation of the school act of 1842 remained significant.²¹ We thus expect these inspector reports to provide relatively good insights into the determinants of those variations.

Considered as source material, these school inspector reports are informative. The reports from these years consist of 1081 densely typed pages (29 pages not listed in the table of contents). Although covering the themes described above, the reports from individual dioceses were of varying length and content. On average, each report was 90 pages long, but the range was striking: the report from Uppsala Archdiocese occupied a modest 25 pages, while the report from Linköping Diocese was 256 pages in length.²² These reports certainly provide a unique opportunity to examine schooling in various regions and localities in Sweden. Nevertheless, as a result of the differences in length and content, there are some limits to the type of analysis that can be performed. For example, the reports do not allow a detailed examination of regional differences. However, overall they do provide insights into how the inspectors perceived the development of the school system in different geographical areas and how they identified factors that influenced the school system's development.

Apart from acknowledging the varying character of the school inspector reports, we also recognize the top-down perspective of these reports. As a result, these reports are not a self-evident indicator of the development of the Swedish school system; they are also a reflection of the school inspectors' perceptions of schooling and of the rural population. However, this limitation also conveys an advantage, since the reports are detached from the perspectives of school boards, teachers, and parents. As a result, this source material may provide insights into issues such as absenteeism, which might seem normal for teachers, and erratic behaviour of school boards—a phenomenon that is difficult to find in locally produced source materials, such as school board minutes.

Children's Work at Homes, on Estates, and at Mansions

In the mid-nineteenth century, Sweden was a sparsely populated and largely rural country. In 1840, 90 per cent of the population lived in rural areas, and although its territory was 80 per cent that of France, its population was only 10 per cent of

France's.²³ At the same time, about 80 per cent of the Swedish population worked in agriculture, either as farmers or as part of the growing number of more-or-less landless agricultural workers.²⁴

These general societal conditions certainly affected what the school inspectors noted in their reports. As Mary Jo Maynes emphasized in her study of schooling in France, the decision to send children to school was primarily a family decision, in which a variety of social, economic, and political factors played a crucial role.²⁵ As a result, there are multiple examples of nineteenth-century settings where the need for children's labour meant that they could not attend school. In this respect, Mike Corbett indicated a "structural incompatibility" between schooling and rural work, using examples from the history of education in Canada. Quoting Chad Gaffield, describing francophone children in eastern Ontario, Corbett reminds the reader that children in that context "were simply producers not pupils."²⁶

Judging from the school inspector reports, the conditions of rural families in Sweden prevented children from attending schools. As research into the livelihood of rural families in Sweden has shown, children often did important work at home, including helping their parents with chores such as caring for younger siblings, preparing food, and caring for cattle—tasks that could be crucial for the family economy.²⁷ The school inspector reports indicate the range of tasks that kept children from school. These included work in the farmers' own households, such as daily chores and harvesting. For example, the Linköping inspector described children's work in the household managing siblings and animals and performing various chores as one of many reasons for uneven school attendance.²⁸ In another case, the inspector from Strängnäs reported that a school district had been forced to extend the summer holidays by one week to allow pupils to participate in the potato harvest.²⁹ Reports from Lund Diocese also indicate that children's work at home weakened school attendance. There, the school inspector noted that almost none of the older children attended school between sowing in early April and late harvest in November.³⁰

The development of the servant system (*tjänstefolkssystemet*) in Sweden was presented as an explanation for children's absence from school. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the importance of servants for the agricultural labour supply decreased, while wages increased.³¹ In this context, the school inspector of Uppsala noted that the reduced supply of servants and their increased salaries meant that parents tended to keep their children at home, where they could provide cheaper labour, instead of sending them to school.³²

Apart from children's work at their parents' farms, schooling was also affected by children's work out of the home. The literature on the determinants of schooling has portrayed landholding elites and industrialists as both promoters and opponents of schooling.³³ Although school inspector reports cannot provide unequivocal evidence to support either stand, these reports provide illustrative examples of how such unequal distribution of resources could affect schooling. Children's work at manors (*herrgårdar*) could reduce attendance. The manors were mostly found in southern Sweden, in the Mälaren Valley (including the areas surrounding the cities of Uppsala, Stockholm, and Västerås), and in the regions of Östergötland, Västergötland, and

Skåne.³⁴ In Uppsala Diocese, the school inspector claimed the manors affected schooling negatively. At times when the workload was great at mansions, only the youngest children attended the school.³⁵ On a similar note, the inspector of Linköping Diocese, which includes the region of Östergötland, stated that farmers' children often had better school attendance than the children of agricultural labourers or those farmers working at mansions. According to the inspector, this tendency resulted from the harsh economic pressure, hard work, and "poor self-cultivation" among these groups.³⁶

In addition to the demands of agricultural work, the inspector reports offer insights into how emerging industries obstructed schooling in the mid-nineteenth century. At this time, child labour was not uncommon in Sweden, especially in certain industries. For example, in 1860, 25 per cent of the workforce in the tobacco and glass manufacturing industry consisted of children under the age of fifteen, as were approximately 44 per cent of the workers in the match-making industry.³⁷

The impact of industrialization was addressed in school inspector reports. Reports from the Linköpings Diocese mentioned how the establishment of industry paralyzed all school activities within a school district. Outside the industrial city of Årvidaberg, the inspector claimed that the establishment of a sulphur plant resulted in 110 children not attending school. To solve this problem, the children were divided into two groups that alternated between working at the sulphur plant and attending school every other day.³⁸ However, industrialization was not only a hindering force; it was also reported that schooling could benefit greatly from nearby industry. In the same diocese, Linköping, a private school had been established by the Swartziska snuff factory. This school was primarily for the children of the workers, but was open for other children and under the leadership of the priest. The school was described as kept in good order and functional in all aspects.³⁹

Parents' Poverty and Negative Attitudes Towards Schooling

In addition to children's work, which highlights how mansions, the livelihood of farmers, and early industrialization could affect schooling, school inspectors noted how parents could have a negative impact on schooling. Such an analysis of the role of parents is well-known. For example, Mary Jo Mayne has shown how parents' poverty and perception of schooling was a major obstacle to mass education in nineteenth-century France.⁴⁰ Ben Eklof also recognized poverty as an obstacle to schooling in a Russian school context, showing how parents would object to what they understood as an overly extensive education that wasted children's time and drove them away from their family and village.⁴¹

School inspectors in Sweden reported similar parental attitudes. While the nineteenth century has correctly been described as a time when society was educationalized—in the sense that all sorts of social, economic, and cultural problems were perceived as problems that could be solved by means of education—the school inspector reports indicate that this discursive practice had not been completely established in rural nineteenth-century Sweden.⁴² The school inspectors explained negative parental attitudes towards schooling in various ways. Some linked these attitudes

to poverty, the low level of parents' education, lack of interest in education, and what was described as negligence (*försumlighet*).⁴³ Complaints about parents' lack of interest in education recurred in the reports and were based on the assumption that the parents did not understand the value of education and therefore acted with carelessness (*vårdslöshet*).⁴⁴

This understanding of education included the widespread view among parents that school was unnecessary. In a vivid report from Växjö Diocese, the inspector reported that the parents considered schools not only as unnecessary, but even as harmful. According to the inspector, parents expected that their children would grow up to become manual labourers, and therefore did not require any knowledge apart from the Christian message. They believed that their children would stay happiest in their single-mindedness and should not receive more knowledge than they need. Nothing would be gained by giving children a half-formed education and thereby creating lots of so-called peasant lawyers.⁴⁵

Such parental attitudes were expressed in various ways and were reported from the Växjö, Karlstad, Härnösand, and Visby Dioceses.⁴⁶ In the Uppsala Diocese, the inspector reported that parents showed open opposition to schooling by withholding their children from schooling. In another case, the parents were claimed to oppose schooling through "treacherous lack of interest" (*dolsk liknöjdhet*) as a kind of passive resistance.⁴⁷ The latter was also shown by not teaching their children at home, or by refusing to buy their children school books.⁴⁸ In Uppsala Diocese, parental opposition towards schooling was described as a (mild) form of rebellion (*tredska*). In another part of this diocese, the obvious opposition towards schooling was explained by attributing it to the obstinate nature of common people.⁴⁹ In Skara Diocese, it was reported that the parents gave the teacher an ultimatum to either meet their restricted vision of schooling or they would not send their children to school.⁵⁰

This parental opposition was sometimes founded on religious beliefs. While studies have identified links between Protestantism and literacy or schooling, school inspector reports indicate that religious beliefs could hamper nineteenth-century schooling in at least two respects.⁵¹ The well-established practice of confirmation reading seems to have affected how schooling was perceived. The confirmation reading was intended to provide the amount of religious knowledge required for the individual's first communion, which also marked a transition into adulthood.⁵² Based on this tradition, some parents argued that schools should be limited to the subjects that prepared children for the vital confirmation reading.⁵³ This meant that some schools put more emphasis on learning the catechism by heart than on basic writing ability, and that once children achieved the requirements of the communion, stopped attending school.⁵⁴ In that respect, a school inspector noted that the confirmation reading has had a great impact on the primary school, transforming it for some children into mere preparation for the confirmation reading.⁵⁵

School inspectors also noted that the beliefs of Protestant sectarian groups could weaken attendance. Since the Christian beliefs of Methodists, Baptists, and pietistic Lutheran revival movements such as Laestadian Lutheranism diverged from those that were taught in schools, these groups took various actions that included absenteeism

and the establishment of private schools to foster their children in true Christianity.⁵⁶ In Linköping Diocese, the inspector noted that six children in one of the inspected school districts did not attend school due to their Baptist beliefs.⁵⁷ Similar issues were found in the county of Dalarna.⁵⁸ In subsequent inspector reports, the inspector of Härnösand Diocese noted that children from families oriented towards baptism “did not like to visit school,” and in Linköping, the inspector complained about “Baptist disbelief.”⁵⁹ In the Swedish context of a state-sanctioned school, in which the Swedish Lutheran church was an integral part of both schooling and government, divergent Protestant beliefs could thus appear as a hindrance for schooling.

Another important reason for parental opposition to schooling was home-to-school distances. As was the case in many rural areas in the nineteenth century, rural Sweden was marked by sometimes significantly long distances to school. For example, home-to-school routes could be five to eight kilometres in the French Alps, while school routes of between three and five kilometres were identified in the American states of Iowa and Minnesota.⁶⁰ In Sweden, a statistical compilation shows that 15 per cent of all schoolchildren had to travel more than five kilometres to school in 1865 (Table 1).⁶¹

Table 1.
Home to School Distances in Sweden, 1865 and 1868

Distance to School for Children in Primary and Junior Schools						
	Shorter than 50 km (%)		Between 25 km and 50 km (%)		Longer than 50 km (%)	
Diocese	1865	1868	1865	1868	1865	1868
Uppsala	81	81	4	15	15	4
Linköping	74	75	6	19	20	6
Skara	77	78	4	18	19	4
Strängnäs	74	76	6	19	20	5
Västerås	83	84	5	12	12	4
Växjö	76	78	5	18	19	4
Lund	92	92	1	7	7	1
Göteborg	85	85	3	11	12	4
Kalmar	85	84	2	14	13	2
Karlstad	81	84	4	13	15	3
Härnösand	75	79	11	10	14	11
Visby	75	76	4	19	21	5
All dioceses	81	83	4	13	15	4

Source: *Bidrag till SVERIGES OFFICIELL STATISTIK p) Folkundervisningen* (Stockholm: Iwar Haeggströms boktryckeri, 1870), xii.

The school inspectors remarked that the long school routes could make parents refrain from sending their children to school. In Skara Diocese, the primary school inspector noted that the younger children were not sent to school by their parents during the dark winter season or when the weather was bad.⁶² In the north of Sweden, significant problems arising from long home-to-school distances were reported. An inspector noted that some children had such a long way to go to school that they brought food for several days and tried to find lodging near the school. However, because of poverty and the unwillingness of families near the schools to lodge these children, they were allowed to lodge at the schoolhouse.⁶³

In addition to school routes, parental poverty was a recurring obstacle to children's schooling. Examples of this can be found in the reports from the Linköping and Visby Dioceses. School inspectors reported that parents' poverty forced them to work during all daylight hours, which meant that they could not help their children with their schoolwork.⁶⁴ A school inspector also noted the problem of home teaching during the dark winter months, when the poor population did not have access to lighting.⁶⁵ Other inspectors also noted more acute problems, where the children had to stay home to ensure that the family would get food for the day.⁶⁶

Poverty also promoted absenteeism in other ways. Reports showed that some families did not send their children to school because they could not give them any food provisions to take to school.⁶⁷ Other inspectors reported that poor families could not afford to buy shoes that would enable their children to walk to school in the winter.⁶⁸ An inspector also noted that poor families with many children could not afford to send all their children to school, since they could not afford school books and suitable clothes for all of them.⁶⁹

The Influence of the Local School Board

Apart from poverty, parental attitudes towards schooling, and child labour at farms and mansions and in industries, which all affected the demand for schooling, the school inspector reports also contain indications of factors that restricted the supply of schooling. When examining school inspector reports, one factor that stands out is the actions of local school boards.

According to the school act of 1842, each school district would be governed by a school board, under the leadership of the parish priest or his representative. The school board's mission was to supervise teaching and oversee the schools within the district. This meant that the school board would administer the school, secure the quality of teaching, and ensure that discipline was maintained. The school board was also responsible for formulating local school regulations for the schools within its district.⁷⁰

While the school boards can therefore be seen as the instrument of the central government, with the task of organizing the education of the Swedish population, the school inspectors were often very critical of the school boards. In a majority of the dioceses, inspectors reported how members of the school boards appeared indifferent to their duties and their assignment in general, something that contributed strongly to deficiencies in the provision of schooling.⁷¹ The school boards' lack of interest in the

schools was expressed in various ways. For example, it was reported that school board members in the Uppsala Diocese neglected to check whether the teachers did their teaching, failed to visit the schools to encourage teachers and students, and had even been absent from school board meetings. However, the inspector pointed out that there was not much that could be done about the matter, because the villagers in the school boards were fiercely independent and did not allow themselves to be commanded to act in a certain way.⁷² Apart from illustrating how school boards could neglect their tasks, this example indicates the role of school inspectors and the challenges that they faced.

The school boards' poor work was also reported by the dioceses of Linköping, Västerås, Växjö, Lund, and Härnösand.⁷³ A common problem reported was that the school boards did not enact local school regulations. For example, the inspector of Karlstad Diocese complained that none of the school boards under inspection had formulated any local school regulations, even though they were obliged to do so.⁷⁴ It is also possible to trace something that can be described as a pragmatic attitude of the school boards, meaning that they perceived schooling as secondary to other societal needs. An example of this can be found in the report of the inspector from Växjö Diocese, who reported that the school board had introduced a local exemption system, which meant that not all parents had to send their children to school.⁷⁵

A widespread complaint targeting school boards was that they failed to inspect their own schools. In the report from Växjö Diocese, the inspector claimed that there were members who did not visit a school for several years.⁷⁶ A similar case was reported by Härnösand Diocese, where a school board member had not inspected a school for years. The inspector noted that this was remarkable, since the board member basically lived next door to the school.⁷⁷ In other cases, inspectors complained that school board members did not even attend school on formal occasions such as the end of the school year.⁷⁸

Reports also complained that the parish priest was the only exemplary member of the school boards—not only the driving force, but also the board member who did all the work.⁷⁹ In this respect, the parish priest stood in contrast to other school board members, who were described as inexperienced and ignorant in matters of schooling and teaching, and as generally less competent to manage a school district.⁸⁰ This pronounced incompetence and widespread unwillingness among school board members can be linked to the fact that it could be difficult to appoint school board members.⁸¹ In Linköping Diocese, the inspector reported a school board that consisted of only two of the four members required.⁸² Understaffing also appeared in other ways. In another school district in Linköping Diocese, the school inspector noted a problematic situation in which the teacher was not only the teacher but also the substitute priest and thus chairman of the school board.⁸³

Teachers' Age, Education, and Secondary Occupations

Apart from being restrained by the workings of the school board, the supply of schooling was affected by the teachers working at schools. The challenge of providing emerging national school systems with qualified teachers has been acknowledged in

the research literature, and descriptions of badly educated and unfit teachers and the low status of nineteenth-century teachers are legion.⁸⁴

In the case of Sweden, school inspectors frequently criticized the lack of teachers with a formal qualification, something that they reported from Linköping, Skara, Västerås, Karlstad, and Härnösand Dioceses.⁸⁵ In Sweden, this was partly due to the fact that teachers were only trained at teacher seminars held in Stockholm and at the seats of the twelve dioceses. In 1860, for example, the teacher seminars trained only 309 students in total, which gave an average of 24 teacher students per seminar. In a school system that had 4241 teachers employed in 1859, 34 per cent of whom lacked a degree from a teacher seminar, this obviously implied a challenge for the local school boards. This was particularly so since the number of students at teacher seminars varied significantly across dioceses from an average of 81.6 students per year in 1860–1864 in Lund Diocese, and 30 in the city of Stockholm, to 14 each in Skara and Strängnäs Dioceses (see Table 2).⁸⁶ The resulting “lack of decent teachers” could, as it did in a school district in Linköping Diocese, lead to the failure to establish a school.⁸⁷

Table 2.
Average Number of Student Teachers, 1850–1864

Diocese	1850–54	1855–59	1860–64
Lund	66	69	82
Göteborg	34	25	54
Växjö	34	28	35
Linköping	33	31	29
Stockholm	35	19	30
Uppsala	32	21	30
Skara	37	28	14
Karlstad	27	20	27
Härnösand	27	15	16
Kalmar	17	22	17
Västerås	17	17	19
Strängnäs	16	10	14
Visby	9	12	14

Source: Per Paulsson, *Historik öfver folkundervisningen i Sverige från äldsta till närvarande tid* (Stockholm: Adolf Bonnier, 1866), 400–401.

The teacher problem was, however, not just about the availability of teachers. Another problem, reported by the school inspectors in Linköping, Strängnäs, Västerås, and Skara Dioceses, was the teachers’ occasionally advanced age.⁸⁸ It was not just the

teachers' advanced age and failing health that could make older teachers be seen as a problem: they might also lack the right training, as was reported in Västerås and Västjör Dioceses, or lack proper teaching skills.⁸⁹ In Gothenburg Diocese, there was a case of what the school board described as utter negligence and inability. When a teacher named Berg re-entered his service, members of the school board reported that Berg not only exhibited merely the most basic and elementary knowledge of geography, but also knew little about subjects such as music, basic math, and grammar. Perhaps worst of all, he had a very vague and erroneous knowledge of the catechism and biblical history. On being questioned about why he showed such poor knowledge, he replied that he had sold all his books after graduating from the teacher seminar.⁹⁰

The problems stemming from the teachers' age may be explained in various ways. One important factor was the limited availability of teachers with a teaching exam, which made it difficult to replace an older or unskilled teacher. There was also the problem of teacher salaries. The employment of new and younger teachers could imply greater cost, something one can see examples of in Linköping Diocese, where the school board had a longstanding problem of an aging teacher who could not be replaced due to lack of funds.⁹¹

Judging from the school inspector reports, the supply of schooling was also affected by teachers' secondary occupations. In line with a tradition of livelihood diversification (*mångsyssleri*) in the Swedish countryside—which, for the individual, meant a diversified and thus safer livelihood—teachers often made a living from more than one job. In the 1890s, 57 per cent of rural teachers still had a secondary occupation.⁹²

Although this tradition of multiple livelihoods had advantages for the teachers, school inspectors noted a negative impact on school education.⁹³ From Linköping, Västerås, and Västjör Dioceses, the reports lamented that the teachers, because of extra work, neglected the home teaching and checked student answers orally.⁹⁴ From Karlstad Diocese, the inspectors reported that it was generally known that the teachers' salary benefits were so poor that teachers were forced to seek secondary occupations in the form of private tuition or other tasks to avoid indebtedness and poverty. However, this led to their main occupation—teaching—being neglected.⁹⁵ A similar issue was reported from Uppsala Diocese. There, the inspector reported a teacher who, in addition to his teaching, also worked as an organist, an agricultural labourer, and in commercial businesses.⁹⁶

Conclusion

Following the passage of the school act of 1842, a decentralized school system was established in Sweden. Based on school inspector reports, this article has provided insights into how this rise of mass schooling during the nineteenth century was affected by a wide range of factors. The demand for schooling was clearly restricted by children's work on their parents' farms, as well as their labour at manors and in industry. Poverty, a rural distaste for extended schooling, and long home-to-school distances were other factors that held schooling back.

In relation to existing research, some of these results are of particular interest. While we know that farms, manors, and industry could hamper the development of schooling, this article raises further questions regarding the role of landholding elites and industrialists in the rise of mass schooling. Evidence from the school inspector reports certainly indicates that the school inspectors could perceive that children's work at manors could have a negative impact on school attendance. The inspectors' reports also raise further questions regarding how the transformation of the servant system affected schooling. Did the declining use of servants affect the schooling of farmers' children negatively? This article furthermore encourages additional examinations of the link between Protestantism and schooling, including the changing roles of confirmation reading in the history of schooling and literacy, and the impact of Protestant sectarianism on schooling. While the demands of confirmation reading may have promoted literacy in the early modern era, this may not have been the case in the context of nineteenth-century schooling.

In addition to demand, the supply of schooling was affected by school board members who failed to formulate local school regulations, inspect schools, and even attend school board meetings. We have also highlighted the challenges that school inspectors noted in terms of teachers. For school boards it could be difficult to hire teachers with a formal qualification or what was described as decent teachers. Teachers' advanced ages, failing health, negligence, and secondary occupations were all issues that were raised by the inspectors. In this respect, the school inspector reports have noted two features of the Swedish nineteenth-century school system that are of particular interest. The first was the inability to educate sufficient numbers of teachers. The geographical distribution of teacher seminars, and their impact on regional variations in the development of school enrolment and literacy skills, is certainly an issue that requires further study. The second was that it was not only the population targeted by schools (parents and children) that affected the development of schooling, but also those organizing schools. As is evident from this article, the local organization of schooling could also be a factor that hampered schooling.

Although school inspector reports may not provide conclusive evidence on the determinants of local school development in nineteenth-century Sweden, the overview of societal factors that these reports provide offers important insights into the dynamics of schooling at this time. As we have shown, there were no simple lines of conflict between proponents and opponents of schooling. Instead, school inspector reports describe a complex situation where farmers, as well as school boards, teachers, and landed elites, could limit the growth of schooling, and where even the Protestant faith could hold schooling back. As a result, the role of the state, and particularly the local community, becomes particularly complex. Although it certainly was the investment of the local school districts that enabled the expansion of schooling in the decentralized Swedish primary school system, it was nevertheless the parents, children, the teachers, and the leaders of these school districts that also held this expansion back.

Notes

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- 1 For international perspectives on these issues, see, for example, Peter Lindert, *Growing Public: Social Spending and Economic Growth since the Eighteenth Century*. Vol. 1. *The Story* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); L. W. B. Brockliss and Nicola Sheldon, *Mass Education and the Limits of State Building, c. 1870–1930* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Johannes Westberg, Lukas Boser, and Ingrid Brühwiler, eds., *School Acts and the Rise of Mass Schooling—Education Policy in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).
- 2 Regarding the concepts of supply and demand, see, for example, John E. Craig, “Chapter 4: The Expansion of Education,” *Review of Research in Education* 9, no. 1 (1981): 157.
- 3 Elsie Rockwell and Eugenia Roldán Vera, “State Governance and Civil Society in Education: Revisiting the Relationship,” *Paedagogica Historica* 49, no. 1 (2013): 1–2.
- 4 In the case of Sweden, see, for example, John Boli, *New Citizens for a New Society: The Institutional Origins of Mass Schooling in Sweden* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1989); Jakob Evertsson, “History, Nation and School Inspections: The Introduction of Citizenship Education in Elementary Schools in Late Nineteenth-Century Sweden,” *History of Education* 44, no. 3 (2015).
- 5 Ben Eklof, *Russian Peasant Schools: Officialdom, Village Culture, and Popular Pedagogy, 1861–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 2–3.
- 6 See, for example, Lindert, *Growing Public*, ch. 5.
- 7 Nancy Beadie, “Education, Social Capital and State Formation in Comparative Historical Perspective: Preliminary Investigations,” *Paedagogica Historica* 46, no. 1–2 (2010), 29–30.
- 8 See, for example, Francesco Cinnirella and Erik Hornung, “Landownership Concentration and the Expansion of Education,” *Journal of Development Economics* 121 (2016); Gabriele Cappelli, “One Size That Didn’t Fit All? Electoral Franchise, Fiscal Capacity and the Rise of Mass Schooling across Italy’s Provinces, 1870–1911,” *Cliometrika* 10, no. 3 (2016); Francisco J. Beltrán Tapia, “Enclosing Literacy? Common Lands and Human Capital in Spain, 1860–1930,” *Journal of Institutional Economics* 9, no. 4 (2013); Francisco J. Beltrán Tapia and Julio Martínez-Galarraga, “Inequality and Education in Pre-Industrial Economies: Evidence from Spain,” *Explorations in Economic History* 69 (2018); Timo Boppart, Josef Falkinger, Volker Grossmann, Ulrich Woitek, and Gabriela Wüthrich, “Under Which Conditions Does Religion Affect Educational Outcomes?,” *Explorations in Economic History* 50, no. 2 (2013).
- 9 See, for example, Eklof, *Russian Peasant Schools*, ch. 12; Bruce Curtis, “Patterns of Resistance to Public Education: England, Ireland, and Canada West, 1830–1890,” *Comparative Education Review* 32, no. 3 (1988); Mary Jo Maynes, “Work or School? Youth and the Family in the Midi in the Early Nineteenth Century,” in *The Making of Frenchmen: Current Directions in the History of Education in France, 1679–1979*, ed. Donald M. Baker and Patrick J. Harrigan (Waterloo, ON: Historical Reflections Press, 1980); Wayne E. Fuller, *The Old Country School: The Story of Rural Education in the Middle West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), ch. 3.
- 10 Eugene Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976), 304–05, 319–21.
- 11 Mats Sjöberg, *Att säkra framtidens skördar: Barndom, skola och arbete i agrar miljö. Bolstad pastorat 1860–1930* (Linköping: Linköping University, 1996), 70–71, 187–89.
- 12 See, for example, Egil Johansson, “The History of Literacy in Sweden in Comparison with Some Other Countries,” *Educational Reports Umeå*, no. 12 (Umeå University

- and Umeå School of Education, 1977); Egil Johansson, "'Kunskapens träd,' Artiklar i undervisningens historia II," *Scriptum*, no. 7 (Umeå: Umeå University, 1988); Egil Johansson, "Läser och förstår," Artiklar i undervisningens historia III," *Scriptum*, no. 10 (Umeå: Umeå University, 1989); Egil Johansson, "'Mindre än minimum': den gamla hemläsningen och föräldrarnas ambitioner för barnen i ljuset av folkskoleinspektörernas berättelser 1861–68," *Forskning om utbildning*, no. 4 (1991); Egil Johansson, "Staten och skolan vid 1800-talets mitt: Ett lokalt och mer nyanserat perspektiv," in *Utbildningshistoria 1992*, ed. Egil Johansson and Stig G. Nordström (Uppsala: Föreningen för svensk undervisningshistoria, 1992).
- 13 Johannes Westberg, *Att bygga ett skolväsende: Folkskolans förutsättningar och framväxt 1840–1900* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2014), 107–08, 148–54.
 - 14 Johannes Westberg, "Basic Schools in Each and Every Parish: The School Act of 1842 and the Rise of Mass Schooling in Sweden," in *School Acts and the Rise of Mass Schooling*.
 - 15 Westberg, "Basic Schools in Each and Every Parish," 208.
 - 16 Jonas Ljungberg and Anders Nilsson, "Human Capital and Economic Growth: Sweden 1870–2000," *Cliometrica* 3, no. 1 (2009): 80.
 - 17 Johan Wallner, *Folkskolans organisation och förvaltning i Sverige under perioden 1842–1861* (Lund: Håkan Ohlssons boktryckeri, 1938), 203–10.
 - 18 Josef S. Gralén, *Folkskolinspektionen i Örebro län åren 1861–1914—jämte kortfattad översikt av folkundervisningen före 1861* (Stockholm: AB Littorin Rydén, 1958), 83–84.
 - 19 Johannes Westberg, *Att bygga ett skolväsende*, 115–16. For an account that stresses the school inspectors' active role in the implementation of citizenship education in Swedish schools, see Evertsson, "History, Nation and School Inspections," 259–74.
 - 20 Gralén, *Folkskolinspektionen i Örebro län*, 83–84.
 - 21 See, for example, Westberg, "Basic Schools in Each and Every Parish," 209–10.
 - 22 *Berättelser om folkskolorna i riket, för åren 1861–1863 afgifna av tillförordnade Folskole-Inspektörer* (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & söner, Kongl Boktryckare, 1885).
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 - 25 Maynes, "Work or School?," 117–20.
 - 26 Mike Corbett, "Protracted Struggle: Rural Resistance and Normalization in Canadian Educational History," *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* 13, no. 1 (2011), 23. The quotation is from p. 30.
 - 27 Janken Myrdal, *Det Svenska jordbrukets historia: Band 4 Jordbruket i industrisamhället: 1870–1945* (Stockholm: Natur och kultur, 2001), 53–55; Jan Mispelaere, "'När det så stor varder att det något kan göra': Om barns och ungdomars arbete i det tidigmoderna Sverige," *Historisk Tidskrift (S)* 133, no. 1 (2013).
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 - 29 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Strengnes stift 1861–1863," 20, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.
 - 30 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Lunds stift 1861–1863," 38, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.
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 - 32 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Uppsala erkestift 1861–1863," 11, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.

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- 35 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Uppsala erkestift 1861–1863," 11–12, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.
- 36 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Linköpings stift 1861–1863," 18, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.
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- 38 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Linköpings stift 1861–1863," 105, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.
- 39 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Linköpings stift 1861–1863," 122, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*. The investment of industries in schooling is examined further in Madeleine Michaëlsson, *Privata bidrag till folkskolan: Järnbruken och det svenska folkskoleväsendet 1850–1930* (Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, 2016).
- 40 Maynes, "Work or School?," 115–33.
- 41 Eklof, *Russian Peasant Schools*, 368, 370–71, 373. For investigations indicating similar parental perceptions of schooling in Sweden, see, for example, Sjöberg, *Att säkra framtidens skördar*, ch. 2; Evertsson, "History, Nation and School Inspections," 270–71.
- 42 On nineteenth-century educationalization, see, for example, Daniel Tröhler, *Pestalozzi and the Educationalization of the World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
- 43 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Linköpings stift 1861–1863," 34, 40, 42, 44–45, 48, 53–55, 60–61, 76, 86, 94–96, 101, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*; "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Strengnes stift 1861–1863," 10, 14, 18, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*; "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Westerås stift 1861–1863," 2, 12, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.
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- 45 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Wexjö stift 1861–1863," 55, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.
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- 49 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Uppsala stift 1861–1863," 9, 18, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.
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- 54 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Uppsala stift 1861–1863," 16, 21, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.
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- 57 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Linköpings stift 1861–1863," 184, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.
- 58 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Vesterås stift 1861–1863," 45, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.
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- 63 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Hernösands stift 1861–1863," 3, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.
- 64 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Linköpings stift 1861–1863," 38, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*; "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Wisby stift 1861–1863," 11, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.
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- 66 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Wexiö stift 1861–1863," 53, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.
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- 71 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Uppsala erkestift 1861–1863," 11, 16, 24, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*; "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Linköpings stift 1861–1863," 24, 32, 126, 175, 187, 206–08, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*; "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Strenghäls stift 1861–1863," 46, 59, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*; "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Västerås stift 1861–1863," 10, 52, 54, 57–58, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*; "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Växjö stift 1861–1863," 42, 58, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*; "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Lunds stift 1861–1863," 11–12, 21, 25, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*; "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Kalmar stift 1861–1863," 25, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.
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- 81 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Linköpings stift 1861–1863," 168–69, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.
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- 86 Per Paulsson, *Historik öfver folkundervisningen i Sverige från äldsta till närvarande tid* (Stockholm: Adolf Bonnier, 1866), 400–01.

- 87 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Linköpings stift 1861–1863," 207–08, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.
- 88 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Linköpings stift 1861–1863," 22, 151, 153, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*; "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Strenghäls stift 1861–1863," 48–49, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*; "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Skara stift 1861–1863," 54–55, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*; "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Västerås stift 1861–1863," 22, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.
- 89 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Västerås stift 1861–1863," 22, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*; "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Växjö stift 1861–1863," 70, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.
- 90 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Göteborgs stift 1861–1863," 39–41, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.
- 91 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Linköpings stift 1861–1863," 153, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.
- 92 Johannes Westberg, "How Did Teachers Make a Living? The Teacher Occupation, Livelihood Diversification and the Rise of Mass Schooling in Nineteenth-Century Sweden," *History of Education* 48, no. 1 (2019), table 1.
- 93 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Linköpings stift 1861–1863," 46, 200, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*; "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Karlstads stift 1861–1863," 26, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.
- 94 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Linköpings stift 1861–1863," 20, 105, 112, 127–28, 134, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*; "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Västerås stift 1861–1863," 3, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*; "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Växjö stift 1861–1863," 16, 18, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.
- 95 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Karlstads stift 1861–1863," 26, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.
- 96 "Berättelser om folkskolorna i Uppsala stift 1861–1863," 174, in *Berättelser om folkskolorna 1861–1863*.